



A Healthy Makeover

Sam's Market joins forces with a community nonprofit to introduce better-for-you options

BY TAMMY MASTROBERTE

A year ago, the Alchemist Community Development Corp. in Sacramento, Calif., approached local single-store owner Parminder Grewal to be part of its Healthy Corner Store Makeover project. His store, Sam's Market, is located in the Oak Park neighborhood of Sacramento, an area known as a food desert due to its lack of healthy food options.

The nonprofit organization, whose goal is to create vibrant, equitable, healthy and diverse communities, agreed to help Grewal source and merchandise produce at Sam's Market; provide an open-front cooler and energy-saving night covers for all open coolers to conserve electricity; supply signage; and hold a farm stand outside the store once a week.

"I liked the idea because it was about healthy

food and trying to change the habits of the neighborhood toward healthy options," Grewal told *Convenience Store News for the Single Store Owner*. "The neighborhood is mostly fast food, and I feel like it's a service I can offer the community."

When the project first started, Alchemist Community Development sourced and delivered produce from local farmer's markets twice per week, and also merchandised the fresh fruits and vegetables throughout Sam's Market.

"We provided a small, grab-and-go cooler and shelving for an existing larger

cooler to display the produce, as well as night shades to reduce the electricity usage for all the store's open coolers," Davida Douglas, executive director at Alchemist Community Development, explained.

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— PARMINDER GREWAL, SAM'S MARKET



Sam's Market owner Parminder Grewal shows off one of the store's open-air coolers filled with fresh produce.

One cooler near the door offers fruit, and the retailer added 3 feet of shelving to an existing 12-foot, open-front cooler to display produce. Products include green lettuce, carrots, bananas, peaches, nectarines, apples, pears and seasonal fruit such as mangos and kiwi. There is also a section of shelving in the store that houses onions, potatoes, sweet potatoes and other items that don't need to be refrigerated.

"Oranges, kiwi and strawberries don't sell as well as some of the other [items] like apples, Asian pears and mangos," Grewal reported. "We also do well with mustard greens, cauliflower and tomatoes."

For the first four months of the project, the nonprofit held a farm stand once a week in the store's parking lot, and also had a kickoff event and mini health fair where they brought in other nonprofit organizations for cooking demonstrations and health screenings to increase visibility in the community, according to Douglas.

"We also provided signage in and outside of the store, and did a couple of direct-mail campaigns to the surrounding community, one-quarter mile around the store," she added. "And we do monthly distributing of materials door to door, which is ongoing."



Sam's Market and the Alchemist Community Development Corp. have jointly held a mini health fair and farm stands.



One Year Later

At the beginning of the project, Alchemist Community Development was in charge of purchasing and merchandising the products twice per week, billing Grewal only for the cost of the produce. They also tracked spoilage and pulled whatever products did not sell, reporting back to the store.

Now, one year in, these tasks are in the process of transitioning over to Grewal.

"We were purchasing and merchandising two times a week and now we are down to once a week," Douglas said, explaining that Grewal has taken over the second weekly purchase and will eventually take the entire project on himself. "By the end of September, we will be down to every other week."

The organization continues to make product

suggestions based on what the store already carries. Sam's Market has since added more healthy beverages and a section for frozen produce. There is signage around the healthier beverages and the section is always stocked with bottled water, 100-percent juice, low-sugar options and other healthy drinks.

"We offer concentrated juice and frozen fruits, which started two months ago," Grewal said. "They are selling well, and I feel like it's my moral duty to the community to help."

The nonprofit group will be starting monthly sampling and prep demonstrations in the store, and will continue this for the next couple of years, as long as funding is available, Douglas explained.

In addition to serving the community, the program has helped Grewal expand his customer base and increase sales, he said. "I will continue the program, and also expand to other items," he noted.

Douglas also deems the project a success and is looking forward to it growing even more with the sampling and food demonstrations slated for the future.

"I think it's been successful and well received by the community," she said. **SSO**



Located in a food desert, the single store fills local residents' need for fresh and frozen fruits and vegetables.

